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United States Pressured to Find Evidence of Chemical Weapons

United States inspection teams in Iraq have not yet found conclusive evidence of unconventional weapons. This poses a problem for the Bush administration because the main American rationale for the war - namely removing chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons - is not proving to be true. The worldwide political community will soon show impatience and skepticism due to this lack of results. Scientists in Iraq have offered some possible evidence supporting the claims that Iraq was manufacturing chemical weapons. However, as stated by an American official: "The evidence that we do find will be convincing to most experts, but not necessarily to those predisposed to doubt what we say" (New York Times, 4/26/2003, "Hoping to Speed Iraqi Weapons Hunt, U.S. Plans to Add Teams"). This is because current "evidence" consists of parts and materials that could be interpreted in different ways. For example, inspectors have found traces of chemicals that could be converted to chemical weapons, but could also be used for fertilizers and pesticides.

The Bush administration has dug itself into a hole and is in danger of losing credibility both to the American public and the worldwide political community. For this reason, the United States has recently made plans to triple the size of search teams in Iraq looking for incriminating lethal materials. These teams, called Sensitive Site Teams (SSTs) investigate possible chemical weapons sites. This increase in scientists may sound like great news, but reports from Iraq show that the number of search teams is not necessarily the limiting factor: "... [T]eam members who asked not to be identified said the [Mobile Exploitation Teams] lack almost everything. Vehicles to take the teams to suspect sites are in short supply. Helicopters are often grounded by weather and poor

maintenance. The teams have repeatedly requested radios to communicate with one another, which they still do not have, and there are no systems through which they can file encrypted reports from the field” (New York Times, 4/28/2003, “ Suspicious Discovery Apparently Wasn't Chemical Weapons”). Comments from team members in Iraq show that teams lack many resources that they require to do a thorough job. An New York Times article entitled “Suspicious Discovery Apparently Wasn't Chemical Weapons” paraphrased weapons experts' and analysts' comments: "The four Sensitive Site Teams that have been embedded with maneuvering forces were supposed to be an early warning system and trigger an MET survey of a suspicious site. But the teams' reports have been wildly inaccurate. ... Though [SSTs] are highly motivated, they were deployed here before they were fully trained on the expensive equipment with which they were supplied." One weapons expert in Iraq commented “This system for continued exploitation of sensitive sites is broke, and that's what is being expanded.”

Nothing President Bush says can convince me that chemical weapons or chemical materials will definitely be found in Iraq. But what will happen if no traces of chemical materials are found anywhere? What happens if one of the Bush administration's main rationales for “Operation: Iraqi Freedom” proves to be false? Is there any way to hold our government accountable for these mistakes? I don't know the answers to any of these questions, so I will leave it up to class discussion to determine appropriate action.